DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 168 027 CS 204 730

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TITLE	Eyeing New York's Newspaper Strike.
INSTITUTION	Freedom of Information Center, Columbia, Mo.
REPORT NO	FOI-400
PUB DATE	Feb 79
NOTE	7p.; Footnotes may be marginally legible due to small print
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Arbitration; *Collective Bargaining; *Labor Demands; Labor Problems; Labor Unions; *News Media; *Newspapers; Printing; *Publishing Industry; *Strikes

ABSTRACT

The New York newspaper strike of 1978 was the direct result of a series of events that started in 1923 when the pressmen's union established a system that provided a minimum fixed number of pressmen per press unit and legitimized a loose labor pool. From that time, the number of pressmen increased through family-dominated union management that loaded the presses with relatives and through union contracts that prevented publishers from changing labor practices and from establishing cost-efficient automated printing processes. Under the sponsorship of the Publishers Association, the three major New York papers, after instituting cutbacks in the pressroom labor force, went into a strike as a united front during the summer of 1978. In October, Rupert Murdock, owner of the "New York Post," who had used the strike for his own financial advancement, pulled his paper out of the strike and put together a separate settlement with the pressmen. With Murdock out of the negotiations, bargaining began in earnest. The November settlement assured that all pressmen would retain their jobs for the six-year life of the contract; however, the pressroom rolls will be reduced through the normal process of attrition and by substantial retirement initiatives provided by the publishers. (MAI)

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SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM, UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI AT COLUMBIA
FEBRUARY, 1979

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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION CENTER REPORT NO. 400

EYEING NEW YORK'S NEWSPAPER STRIKE

This report was written by Paul Fishlader, an M.A. candidate at the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

Introduction

What follows is in no way an exhaustive or even coherent study of the New York newspaper strike of 1978. Rather, with the excuse that a strike of such magnitude is a serious and lamentable control of information, and with considerable evidence making the strike appear a highly calculated feat of labor-management engineering, this paper will attempt to sort out the forces — forces surely at work throughout the newspaper industry — that moved the men who quieted the nation's greatest city.

Thus the actual progress of the strike negotiations is not considered, nor are the stopgap strike papers or other city media — many of which were profoundly affected by the strike. Large questions of the strike's effect upon the advertising industry, and upon the people of the city and the nation, are indeed barely noted. The scars that the newspaper industry itself may come to wear are barely conjectured. Write it off to an admixture of intention, lack of time and space, and a paucity of authorial range, grasp and ambition.

This paper, then, pretends to trace the publisher-pressmen heritage from the watershed year of 1923 to the present impasse — to reconstruct the arguments and counterarguments on both sides of the dispute, and if it be well done, to make it seem that the strike could not have happened but as it did. There is a story in each of the three newspapers involved, and if it appears that Rupert Murdoch's New York **Post** gets more than its rightful share of attention, Mr. Murdoch's self-assumed role of grand manipulator seems to warrant it.

News, Not Garbage

Francis X. Clines customarily turns out a thrice-weekly column, "About New York," for the New York **Times**. In late August of 1978, unable to write his usual piece for the **Times**, he resorted to the Rupert Murdoch-financed pages of **New York** magazine to inform his readers of just what was going on in New York. Not surprisingly, he chose as his subject the occasion for this irony — New York's newspaper strike. Mr. Clines, though, was not exactly sure what was going on in New York; nor was his co-columnist, **Times** reporter Maurice Carroll. "So age-encrusted and arcane," Carroll wrote, "are the labor relations of the New York papers, so computerishly complex are the technologies. . . that even those involved often do not understand what is happening."[1]

The Great Strike of '78, though, was more than just labor relations and computer technologies, more than the incessant sound and fury of big business clashing with big labor. Serious, moral questions are called up, wrote (**Wall Street Journal**, 10-5-78) Columbia University's Fred Friendly, "when the world's greatest city is robbed of the essential stimuli to its central nervous system — information and probing news analysis." A newspaper strike is not a garbagemen's walkout; the sanitation business is rarely wont to dignify its position with such exclamations as "the people's right to know" and the press's solemn rights under the First Amendment.

Nor do garbage people, steel people or baseball people see their way to claiming exemptions such as those guaranteed the press — the Fourth Estate, the people's proxy. The American law of libel, especially since the decision in **Times v. Sullivan**, bends over backward to the free flow of information. The Newspaper Preservation Act encourages partnerships that would, in any other business, be summarily dispatched as anti-trust. Second-class mail permits amount to government subsidy; in less enlightened days, newspapers successfully resisted the child labor laws of the Wages and Hours Act as infringements of First Amendment rights.

Each of these privileges seems to imply that a great and transcendent good is served as a newspaper is saved. "Is there not a moral obligation to maintain the continuity of serious newspapers?" Fred Friendly asks (**Wall Street Journal**, 10-5-78). "If government can't stop publication, can labor disputes be permitted to do so?" And is it not the case, he continues, that "the integrity of newspapers may be too important for profit-maximizing owners and trade-union hacks?"

The strike cuts right to the spirit of the argument: The burden of rebuttal falls differently, but heavily, on each of the warring tribes.

The publishers' onus is perhaps the more obvious. Their

Summary: Even as the New York newspaper strike of 1978 silenced the nation's largest city, it gave birth to its own great debate. The New York publishers' rallying point was their need to trim economics "to maintain journalistic excellence." And their critics in turn questioned the publishers' right to halt publication — in effect, to cut off the flow of information — in the name of the First Amendment.

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reply is steeped in the irony that almost defines the entire strike: They were forced to suspend publication, they claim, precisely because of the long-term demands of continuity. Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, the **Times'** publisher, replied (**Wall Street Journal**, 10-5-78) to Friendly's barbs:

> At heart, what is missing from Mr. Friendly's argument is a fatal failure to make any connection whatsoever between a free and energetic and a profitable press. Indeed, Mr. Friendly seems to imply that press freedom and profits are incompatible. A financially sound **Times** is also good newspapering. Mr. Friendly, harshly critical of the publishers in the dispute, asks rhetorically, "Is there not a moral obligation to maintain the continuity of serious newspapers?" The answer is yes, but — but not if by failing to confront our business problem we jeopardize our financial health. The only continuity in the poorhouse graveyard is silence.

William J. Kennedy, president of Printing Pressman's Union No. 2, stood for the publishers' antagonists. "Arthur Sulzberger's letter," he wrote (**Wall Street Journal**, 10-16-78), "does not accurately state the facts about the strike. The true story of this unfortunate episode may never be told, but this much can be said. The strike was precipitated by three publishers, with completely different interests, united in a grand plan to destroy our union."

This might seem merely the stock repartee of labor disputes, but for the curious power these strangers in the information business (the pressmen, that is) came to exert upon that great public good, the free and robust flow of information. The publishers may have forced the issue, but the pressmen shut down the papers. When, on Aug. 9, the publishers posted new "work rules" — instituting cutbacks in pressroom manning — Kennedy's union walked out: It was 89 days before the papers published again.

History Catches Up With Itself

The publishers thought that they were fighting for their very lives, and money was their lives' blood. "Money was not the primary factor," the **New Republic** wrote. "It was the only factor."[2] They looked down into their pressrooms and saw a manning system predicated upon a 55-year-old agreement. They peered about and saw the eager encroachments of their "cost-efficient" suburban competitors. In early 1977, Arthur "Punch" Sulzberger told **Times** stockholders that pressroom overmanning was the paper's most serious problem. On Aug. 9, then, they saw no alternative but to post new work rules as a basis, they said for negotiation with the pressmen.

The pressmen said that they too were fighting a life-or-death struggle. Wages and working conditions, the usual strike fare, were peripheral issues at best: The manning issue placed their jobs and their craft, they felt, on the block. As the newspaper industry whirred and clattered into the computer age, obsolescence yawned.

Fifty-five-year-old labor union lore and the '70s information machine could not but clash. 1923 stands as the landmark year for the New York pressmen: They last struck the papers in 1923, and the contract born of that strike has been the mold upon which all subsequent pressmen's contracts have been cast. The contract set a double precedent: It established the system of so-called "unit-manning," and legitimized the loose and often haphazard pressman-newspaper marriage.

The unit-manning arrangement provided a minimum fixed number of pressmen per press unit. The crew could be supplemented for heavy press runs, but the minimum could not be violated. Men could not be moved from press to press, from task to task. Manning for maintenance and cleanup was not included in the pressmen's base work day; rather, the publishers paid overtime for this work.

The loose labor pool system has become the pressman's heritage, has defined his way of life. Until about 15 years ago, New York was a significant printing center. The city boasted seven daily newspapers, a crowd of small foreign-language newspapers and a network of independent print shops. The newspapers thus had small daily crews which they could easily augment — for Sunday and special editions — from a vast floating labor pool. Many pressmen worked only three or four days a week; and it was not unusual for a pressman to work two days for the **Times** and two for the **Daily News**. "The system of casual labor," New York **Times** metropolitan editor Jonathan Friendly wrote (New York Times Service, 9-2-78) during the strike, "with relatively low pay and few fringe benefits, served the papers' interests."

It also came to serve the pressmen's interests. While, through the years, other newspaper unions bargained for higher wages and better fringe benefits, the pressmen — with an uncanny prescience — continually built (New York **Times**, 11-6-78) higher manning levels into their contracts, "to assure an availability of shifts and overtime, buying a future for their brothers, sons and nephews, who, typically, were the only ones who knew when the union rolls were opening for new members." And just as, for quality's sake, newspapers have traditionally hired more reporters and editors than are strictly needed, Carroll wrote, "the unions built upon the craft aspect of the printing process — it never has been simply a mechanical trade — and on the labor bias of New York to bargain for similar overstaffing in their work."[3]

So that when the printing industry declined, and four of the city's dailies folded in the 1960s, the publishers found themselves feeling grossly overmanned with pressmen whose union had brought about this "featherbedding." It was in the meshing of the two aspects of the 1923 precedent that the inevitable battle lines were set.

The city's other newspaper unions had not, on the whole, played themselves into similar straits. They had largely bartered manning for wages, benefits and guaranteed jobs for the present generation of workers. In the 114-day strike of 1962-63, the New York Typographical Union had won a strong wage and benefit contract from the publishers. Since the 1962 "watershed" strike, the publishers have, with moderate success, been trying to square the introduction of new technology with labor demands. Both the most notable automation advance, and the most notable labor agreement, have involved the typographers. A 1974 settlement brought the printers lifetime job guarantees in exchange for a go-ahead to install a completely computerized cold-typesetting system — a system that obviates much of the typographers' traditional craft. Arthur Sulzberger called (**Wall Street Journal**, 10-6-78) the contract "trailblazing." Somewhat ironically, the **Times'** cold-type system was installed in July, just as the strike's battle lines were being set. Other unions, the stereotypers — the printing plate makers — and the Guild, have in the past few years agreed to automation-compromise contracts.

But the pressmen, **Time** magazine wrote, remained "the

last casualties in the newspaper industry's long, wrenching and inevitable shift from the benign, family-dominated management to the more bloodless, efficient and profit-minded imperatives that other industries adopted decades ago."[4] The pressmen's 1975 contract — which expired March 30 — reflected their traditional priorities: The basic manning agreement set a level of 17½ men per 6-unit press, compared with a 12-man level at the papers' two main suburban competitors, **Newsday** and the Newark **Star-Ledger**. All in all, the publishers claimed, the 1975 contract guaranteed nearly 50 percent more jobs than at the suburban dailies. Parity with the suburbans became the publishers' goal.

In the spring of 1977, having declared their intentions to their stockholders, the **Times** and the **News** had brought in a consultant to determine precisely the manpower waste in their pressrooms. The consultant's study admitted one unavoidable and universal source of pressroom waste: While the presses run smoothly, pressmen can't but be idle for long stretches of their shifts. The study also found what were to the publishers grade-A avoidables: journeyman pressmen who spent less than one-fourth of their work time at the press and apprentice — or "flyboy" — pressmen who contrived to work but 18 minutes out of a 478-minute shift. The consultant concluded that each press could be run efficiently by a 10-man crew — against the contract's 17. (Such a level would, the study said, be commensurate with manning levels nationwide.)

And although money was not, for the pressmen, an overt issue in the dispute, the publishers saw the effects of the manning levels in the $26,000-$27,000 per year that the average full-time pressman — with overtime, about 50 percent over the base salary of $350 per week — was being paid.

Sulzberger also told (New York **Times**, 11-6-78) the **Times**' stockholders: "The problem is not unique to the **Times**. In almost every major city the same situation has forced metropolitan newspapers to negotiate new agreements with the pressmen's union, thus significantly reducing outdated and onerous manning provisions."

Not unique to New York, but undoubtedly rockier and more severe there than in most other cities. And although pressroom automation was never the stated issue during the strike, it has been both the force behind the labor upheavals and the standard by which they are measured. The smaller papers in the smaller cities have been the first to switch completely to cold-type offset, precisely because they have not had to deal with big-city unionism. Nor have they had to ponder disposing of the metro dailies' titanic investments in hot-metal equipment. On a bare technical level, smaller papers with shorter press runs can make better and more economical use of the offset process.

This has made for a rather curious national picture. According to a 1977 American Newspaper Publishers Association survey, although 70.5 percent of U.S. dailies are now offset, they account for only 31.5 percent of total daily circulation. The laggard 29.5 percent are the large metropolitan papers, crippled by their labor agreements, their size and their huge equipment expenditures. They are being pressed, though, by the smaller papers — their suburban competitors — to seemingly contravene all logic and bring automation into their own houses. "The benefits of automation to big-city newspapers," the **Christian Science Monitor** wrote (8-14-78), "are not as unalloyed and they've moved out of necessity as much as choice."

For the **Times** and the **Daily News**, pressroom automation was more an overhanging sword of Damocles than an issue on the table. Although the papers' printing process is essentially what it had been circa 1923, their drastically improved suburban competition had run them past the turning point. **Daily News** marketing director Jonathan Thompson could write that "automation has nothing to do with these negotiations,"[5] without blinding anyone to the publishers' intent of priming the pressmen for the inevitable and painful coming of offset. Solving the manning problem would both set a precedent — as in the 1974 ITU contract — and ease the financial burden of a changeover.

Not at all surprisingly, what the New York publishers termed "archaic" manning practices and age-worn machinery have held out longest in the strongest labor towns. Some big-city papers — independents such as the **Wall Street Journal** and the Miami **Herald**, papers without union pressmen — have been able both to move ahead technologically and to reduce pressroom manning levels. In Detroit, though, union strength forced a 1977 contract at the **Free Press** allowing for only a five percent reduction in the number of pressmen. In Boston — another strong labor town — "cost-efficient cutbacks" have yet to be achieved.

There has been, in addition, something of a trend — and to Kennedy and the pressmen a fearful trend — toward "breaking" what are considered recalcitrant pressmen's unions. In Kansas City, in Dallas, and in Madison, Wisc., non-union pressmen were brought in to replace striking union workers. The most storied case of "union-busting," though, has been the Washington **Post** strike of 1975. After the pressmen had walked out, vandalizing the presses as they went, **Post** management persuaded some of the other unions — and most notably the deliverers — to cross the picket lines. (Washington has always been a weak union town.) The **Post** was able to publish without the pressmen: The union was broken. Indeed, the shadow of Washington '75 hung heavy over the New York proceedings. The publishers repeatedly denied it, but the pressmen were convinced (**Wall Street Journal**, 10-16-78) that the papers would willingly use Washington **Post** tactics "to bring our union to its knees." The observing experts figured, though, that however much the publishers might have envied such tactics, they wouldn't have stood much of a chance in labor-strong New York.

Newspaper analyst John Morton put (Washington **Star**, 8-23-78) the Big Apple's newspaper war in perspective: "It's a continuation of the battle pressmen have been fighting and losing in many other cities. It's not surprising that they're fighting longer and perhaps last in New York."

A somewhat more ominous note — for the publishers, that is — was sounded (Washington **Post**, 8-8-78) by an attorney who 10 years earlier had represented a Southern paper when it had broken its pressmen's union in a strike: "The papers are absolutely crazy to have precipitated a strike if they don't have a plan to start publishing," he wrote.

The three New York papers, then, decided that the late summer of 1978 was the time to force the manning issue. Summer, they reasoned, is traditionally a slow period for advertising and circulation: The heavy losses of revenue sure to result from a strike would then be minimized. Nor did the publishers expect that the strike would outlive the dog days of August; once the Labor Day business rush rattled around, they felt, the issue would be settled, the papers back on the stands — more profitable than before.

Although the publishers went into the strike as a united front — under the aegis of the New York Publishers Association — each of the papers had been brought to the point of action upon different paths and with idiosyncratic motives. The **Times** was enjoying its greatest profits in

years; the **Daily News** found itself only marginally in the black; and Rupert Murdoch's **Post** — the only afternoon daily in the city — was losing money with almost reckless abandon. The three papers had a combined daily circulation of nearly 3.3 million: The **News**, with the nation's largest circulation, came in at 1.8 million, the **Times** at 900,000, and the **Post**'s 600,000 brought up the rear.

No Longer Seven Little Pennies in the Newsboy's Hand

The **Daily News**, a tabloid as is the **Post**, is at the same time both a phenomenal success and a marginal financial enterprise. It's firmly entrenched as the straphanger's guide to New York, almost a heritage for working New Yorkers — especially for those living in the outer boroughs of Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens and Staten Island. Yet for all of its success, the **Daily News** showed a net profit of less than two percent in 1977. Management back at the Chicago Tribune Company was concerned (UPI, 10-6-78) that, as **News** publisher W.H. "Tex" James said: "The **News** isn't turning a profit that would justify people wanting to invest in our company."

Their worries were legion. In addition to their general overmanning problem, their subsidiary color-printing plant Newspoint was losing money, and management was considering closing it down. The fate of the 145 pressmen employed there greatly troubled the pressmen's union and therefore the **News**' brass. Nor did **News** circulation seem quite the given of past times. The mid-1970s recession had hit the whole industry hard, and the **News** had not regained all of its lost circulation.

Gannett's Westchester-Rockland suburban chain was becoming aggressive, trying to lure the newer crop of ex-city dwellers from the **News**' grasp. The Gannett papers — afternoon papers but for an experimental morning paper, **Today**, which was not begun until the strike had set in — were very strong in two of the **News**' traditional power areas, sports coverage and comics. In fact, the Gannett papers have more comics than any other paper in the New York metropolitan area. According to Gannett publisher Louis A. West III (**Wall Street Journal**, 8-8-78): "Surveys show that people who read us like us. But we reach only 53 percent of our potential audience." In the eyes of **News** executives downtown, Gannett clearly meant to improve upon that figure.

So, because of the challenge — and in spite of it — the **News** decided to force the issue. James later explained (UPI, 10-6-78) the workings of the corporate mind thus: "We're losing money (because of the strike) but the numbers are not nearly as important as our ultimate goal to make the paper more profitable." Besides, management saw that the Tribune Company was faring quite well on the whole, and that the **News**' other interests (the paper owns and operates WPIX radio and television in New York) would help salve the pain of temporary loss. Nonetheless, of the three papers, the **News** — precisely because of the advantage suburban competition could and would engineer during a strike — probably stood to lose the most from a long shutdown.

The 'New' New York Times

The **Times**' woes were the woes of the ambitious. Indeed, rather than seeking to regain a position of lost circulation eminence — circulation was up about 35,000 over 1975 figures — the great, gray New York **Times**' interest was its transformation into the "New New York **Times**." For the **Times**, this meant not only continuing to perform its traditional functions as the "paper of record," but also taking on an additional task; namely, playing the "supermarket journalism" game. Whereas the **News** was battling for the newer, less-affluent suburbanites, the **Times** was currying favor with the upwardly-peering and dreaming. This new element was introduced in response to the 1975 industry drop, and Timespeople saw solving the pressroom manning situation as a matter of allowing the paper to be profitable enough to continue both this expansion and the paper's latest technological additions.

The **Times** was, in fact, enjoying a very rewarding 1978. Its first-half profit of $10,661,000 was an increase of 28 percent over first half 1977. And those figures, of course, do not include any of the other holdings of the New York Times Company: The newspaper's earnings comprised only 34 percent of the grand sum. (The Times Company's communications and communications-related assets include 13 Florida and North Carolina newspapers, **Golf Digest, Family Circle** and **Us** magazines, a Memphis television station, WQXR-FM in New York, Times Books, and three Canadian newsprint manufacturers. The newsprint enterprises surely stood the paper in good stead — especially while many other papers, the **Daily News** included, were citing rising newsprint costs among their most severe financial difficulties.)

In short, the **Times** had all the reasons it needed to attack its problem during the summer of 1978. The larger corporate superstructure could certainly soften any great losses that might be dealt the paper. In addition, the paper could soothingly reflect that — after a temporary drop — the 114-day 1962-63 strike had not cost it any circulation. The **Wall Street Journal** reflected (8-24-78): "**Times** readers will go back. No other paper in the U.S. has such loyal readers." Indeed, the **Times**' position looked so good that during the strike, pressmen's president William Kennedy was moved to remark (AP, 10-2-78): "The **Times** is the problem here. It depends on the **Times**. They suckered the **News** and the **Post** into it."

Murdoch's Magic Show

To all appearances, though, the **Post** would have been at least equally suckered had it not done something. New York's only afternoon daily was a distant third in the circulation race. It was clearly in trouble. For many years a well of declining stability, the **Post** was bought by Australian newspaper magnate Rupert Murdoch in 1977 for $30 million. Murdoch came in and gave the **Post** a "new look," brought its coverage more into line with that of its natural competition, the **News** (lots of crime, disaster and sports), substantially cut back on the number of editorial employees, and actually managed to increase circulation by about 120,000. Nonetheless, the paper lost $10 million the first year (1977) and had lost $8 million so far in 1978. Jonathan Friendly wrote in the New York **Times** (11-6-78):

> Any saving in labor costs was welcome. But labor costs were apparently less of a problem for the **Post** than was the need to increase revenues by building circulation and advertising. Thus, forcing the issue with the pressmen could accomplish one goal or the other, either by cutting the payroll costs or by upsetting readership patterns so that the afternoon tabloid could compete more effectively with the two

morning papers.

Thus, pressroom manning may have been for Murdoch an almost peripheral issue — the **Post** has fewer than 200 pressmen: It was an excuse for him to try to blast New Yorkers out of their age-old preferences and prejudices.

Not only was Murdoch battling the downtown **Daily News** — and to a lesser degree, the **Times** — he was also involved in a suburban skirmish with Long Island's **Newsday**. The area of contention was actually in the city, the borough of Queens. When the afternoon daily **Long Island Press** folded in 1977, the **Post** had taken over its Queens carrier lists: This accounted in large measure for the **Post**'s circulation rise. **Newsday**, though, was aggressively wooing the borough, using all of the advantages of modern newspaper technology and "cost-efficient" labor practice. Murdoch found himself coming up short at both ends. The center, clearly, could not hold.

On a corporate level, Murdoch had considerable leverage and security. In addition to his Australian, British and Texas newspapers, Murdoch owns **New York** magazine and the Manhattan-based weekly, **The Village Voice**. Thus, not only could profits from other enterprises buoy his financial picture during a strike, both the **Voice** and **New York** stood to make money from added advertising and circulation revenues. (During the strike, the **Voice** upped its circulation from 200,000 to 300,000 and its average bulk from roughly 100 pages to about 185.) Another consideration for Murdoch likely was (**Advertising Age**, 9-4-78) that: "The **Post** saves money for Mr. Murdoch by remaining closed." As industry insiders speculated, a short surcease might give (New York Times Service, 9-29-78) the **Post** a chance to regroup and recoup, in preparation for whatever longer-range plans Murdoch might be concocting.

Murdoch had, in a sense, waltzed himself onto the conductor's podium — or at least, so he seemed to think. Nor did it take him very long to start waving his baton. His actions during the strike comprise perhaps the clearest view of his creative intention. About two weeks after the pressmen walked out, rumors began circulating that Murdoch had financed the **Daily Metro**, one of the interim strike papers that quickly moved to fill the New York news void. The **Metro**'s publisher, Frederick Iseman, and Murdoch admitted that the **Post**'s publisher had agreed to buy 150,000 copies per day to supply the **Post**'s home-delivery routes — mainly to keep **Newsday** from winning over Queens customers. Both Murdoch and Iseman claimed that was the extent of the **Post**'s interest in the **Metro**. On Sept. 5, however, it came out that Murdoch had lent the **Metro** "several hundred thousand dollars" and had acquired an option to buy the paper. Although Iseman, under pressure from his staff, pledged the next day that the paper would fold as soon as the strike ended, and Murdoch renounced his option, the **Post**'s publisher's intentions became — at least to the rumormongers — clear. By toying with the **Metro**, Murdoch seemed to be trying to insinuate himself into the morning market, into direct competition with the **News**. (He had been edging toward this even before the strike, getting the "afternoon" **Post** on the streets by 10 o'clock in the morning.)

The other publishers, fearing that Murdoch might try to engineer matters to his own benefit — and consequently to their detriment — had named him president of the Publishers Association of New York. His independence, though, seemed little cramped. According to **Times** general manager Walter Mattson and **News** general manager Joseph Barletta (New York **Times**, 11-7-78), Murdoch's Sept. 15 public call to the other unions to break the pressmen's picket lines "may have been a deliberate attempt to prolong the strike and to give Murdoch time to prepare his separate course."

The Publishers Association, needless to say, could not hold him. On Oct. 27, Murdoch pulled the **Post** out of the joint talks and put together a separate settlement with the pressmen. The agreement was basically a "me-too" pact whereby the **Post** agreed to abide by whatever settlement the other papers made with the union. Murdoch, explaining his split, claimed (New York **Times**, 11-7-78) that the other papers had "made a complete fool" of him by bargaining privately with the pressmen and with their adviser, veteran newspaper negotiator Theodore Kheel. Murdoch wanted nothing to do with Kheel, who, he claimed, was responsible for the death of three papers in the 1963 strike and might help do the same to the **Post**. Both Mattson and Barletta denied the allegations.

Murdoch had engineered a clever and effective scenario. His me-too agreement looked good for the **Post**, for Murdoch himself and for the **Post**'s pressmen. The pressmen would get whatever their fellows at the **News** and the **Times** bargained for — and they, in effect, got it sooner. Murdoch came out looking like a good guy to his pressmen — Kennedy said that whereas Murdoch had at first seemed the anti-union "hawk," he now was the "dove" — while at the same time somewhat weakening the union at the **Post**. And most notably, the **Post** got a chance at the edge it so desperately needed.

Murdoch's move was to establish the **Post** as an all-day paper for the duration of the strike. He clearly hoped that **News** readers would be thereby won over to the **Post**. When the **Post** returned on Oct. 5, the now-larger paper (1,000,000 copies strong) hit the stands by 8:15 a.m. Murdoch further announced (**Wall Street Journal**, 10-2-78) that in order to achieve an all-day **Post**, he would seek a "new definition of the day shift" for the pressmen: Although the new shift would begin at 5 a.m. rather than at 7, the workers would not receive overtime pay for the earlier hours. Kheel, for one, was amazed (**Wall Street Journal**, 10-2-78) by the **Post**'s bold assault upon the **Daily News**: "Several weeks ago I was told," he wrote, "it was Murdoch's plan to weaken the **News** through the negotiations and then move into the morning field. I didn't believe it at the time, but events seem to be making it clear that he has indeed embarked on that course."

And, well on his way to getting the **Post** back on the stands and in the subways, Murdoch — at least according to Kheel and bargainers from the **News** and **Times** — worked to impede a strike settlement. He began (New York **Times**, 11-7-78) a rumor, circulated through **Newsday**, that Kheel and the publishers were conspiring on a "secret deal" that "would be forced down Kennedy's throat." The resulting brouhaha froze the talks for a day until Kennedy was assured of its scurrilousness.

Murdoch's coup, though, was the announcement of his intention to start a new morning paper in New York, to be called the **Sun**. The **Sun**'s raison d'etre, he said, would be to take on the **News** in mortal, morning combat. Murdoch announced the **Sun** in a publisher's letter in the Sunday **Post**. He wrote (**Wall Street Journal**, 10-23-78): "The **Daily Sun** is a large challenge, fraught with risk, but absolutely essential to the viability of the **Post**. We must reduce our costs and we must widen our revenue base." The announcement of the new morning paper, which due to union difficulties has yet to see the light of day, was both the sum of Murdoch's actions and seemingly the almost preconceived plan that motivated those actions. Murdoch's circus most fully raised the New York newspaper strike from a labor dispute to a modern

newspaper drama.

Postscript

Once Murdoch was fairly well out of the negotiation picture, and after the other publishers came to accept Kheel's mediating role, the bargaining began in earnest. A settlement was finally forced Nov. 1 by pressure from the other unions who were threatening to cross the picket lines if Kennedy didn't settle.

At first glance, both sides would seem to have come out quite well. Under the new contract, all 1,508 pressmen's jobs are assured for the six-year life of the contract. The unit manning system will remain in use. Perhaps most significantly, the union staved off a serious threat to its very existence.

The publishers will be able to reduce their pressroom rolls through normal processes of attrition and by offering workers substantial retirement initiatives. Both Kheel and the publishers estimate a nearly one-third reduction in the work force by the end of the contract in 1984, manning parity with their largest suburban competitor, the **Newark Star-Ledger**. They won the right to reduce heavy overtime outlays by sharply cutting back on maintenance and cleanup shifts, as well as the tools to deal with what they saw as painfully wasteful work practices.

On a longer look, though, the verdict may not be so happy. The settlement may not settle anything for very long. In seeking parity with their suburban competition, the papers are "shooting at a moving target."[6] The **Star-Ledger** became the manning paradigm, but it is also the least trim of the suburbans: When its contract comes due in July, management will be seeking a much tighter pressroom contract. Come 1984, the New York publishers will likely be where they were in August of '78 — calling for reduced manning as "the be-all and end-all of their ability to maintain journalistic excellence."[7]

If Fred Friendly is busy with something else six years hence, someone else will no doubt question "Punch" Sulzberger's logic and "unyielding righteousness"[8] that made Myron Farber's plight and pressroom featherbedding all of a piece. Writing in the **New Yorker**, ex-**Times** labor writer A.H. Raskin sees this tension (outlined in the Friendly-Sulzberger exchange in the **Wall Street Journal**) as the strike's mark: He reads in it much of the anger and misunderstanding of those 89 silent days in New York. Moffett, the federal mediator, saw this, too, when he complained early on that "What bugs me about these liberal papers is how they act, as against all that crap they dish out in the Farber case."[9]

The papers are back now, but the talk will go on.

FOOTNOTES

1. Maurice Carroll, "The Strike," **New York**, 28 August 1978, p. 38.
2. David Blum, "New York Without News," **New Republic**, 23 September 1978, p. 17.
3. Carroll, p. 40.
4. "Filling the Inkless Void," **Time**, 4 September 1978, p. 37.
5. "Correspondence: Management's Side," **New Republic**, 14 October 1978, p. 7.
6. "The Negotiation: Intrigue at the Summit," **New Yorker**, 29 January 1979, p. 80.
7. **Ibid.**
8. **Ibid.**, p. 83.
9. **Ibid.**